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Chairman: Ms. Londoño (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Colombia)

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In the absence of Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon), Ms. Londoño (Colombia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 112: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/58/3, A/58/12 and Add.1, A/58/281, 299, 353 and 410, and A/58/415-S/2003/952)

1. **Mr. Akasha** (Sudan) said that the burden of dealing with refugees should be shared between the countries affected and the international community and expressed concern at the decline in international aid to his country, which, because of its geographical position, received large numbers of refugees. Such aid made it possible to redevelop the regions of the country affected by inflows of refugees, paying particular attention to education and health care. His Government had cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and with countries of origin in seeking lasting solutions to the problems of refugees in the Sudan, notably by implementing voluntary return programmes. However, Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, and particularly the children among them, continued to face substantial problems with regard to the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights.

2. He supported the UNHCR "4Rs" strategy, of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction, stressing that the latter two elements of the strategy were particularly important in the search for optimal solutions. The Sudan also supported the "Convention Plus" initiative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. However, he listed a number of outstanding concerns, including the decline in resources available to the UNHCR secretariat, the discriminatory treatment of some refugees, arbitrary measures taken to reduce refugee flows, the safety of United Nations staff in the field and sexual exploitation and abuse in the course of humanitarian operations.

3. **Ms. Pulido Santana** (Venezuela) said that the High Commissioner's comments on the need for greater cooperation between UNHCR and related agencies were particularly timely in the light of the worsening refugee crises around the world. There was also a need for greater cooperation between UNHCR and States, particularly the biggest donors, in order to ensure that humanitarian, political and financial efforts were channelled towards the same goal. As the forced displacement of persons was of concern not just to the States affected directly but also to the international community as a whole, efforts to make optimal use of resources needed to be harmonized and shared.

4. The politicization of discussions on asylum issues seriously jeopardized the chances of alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the countries affected. She agreed with the High Commissioner that an international political climate needed to be created that would be conducive to the implementation of the "4Rs" strategy. In order to create a solid nexus of peace, security, humanitarian action, human rights and development, responsibilities must be shared on the basis of international solidarity and reflected in international assistance. Nevertheless, it was important to remember that primary protection should continue to be the main focus of international action and that forms of international protection other than asylum, including those envisaged in the "Convention Plus" initiative, were also available to refugees.

5. She condemned the continuing attacks on humanitarian personnel and hoped that effective solutions would be found to that problem, so that United Nations and other humanitarian agencies could safely provide humanitarian aid alongside the countries of origin and host countries. Her Government had recently set up a national commission on refugees to ensure that flexible and efficient procedures were in place to guarantee the human rights of refugees in Venezuela who had been forced to leave their home country. In addition, under legislation adopted in 2001, a bilateral mechanism had been set up to make arrangements for displaced persons from Colombia to return home provided that their security could be guaranteed and there was no physical risk to them. Lastly, she stressed her Government's firm commitment to all transparent and non-discriminatory multilateral measures that contributed to the real protection of refugees' rights in a world where peace was so often in the balance.

6. **Mr. Knyazhinskiy** (Russian Federation) said that international humanitarian work, a crucial part of peacekeeping, crisis prevention and post-conflict resolution, should be carried out in strict compliance with the principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. There was a need to streamline the

transition from emergency relief to assistance for economic recovery and sustainable development. His delegation urged humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to cooperate with States to combat terrorism and prevent terrorists from using humanitarian activities as a cover. They should also assist in demilitarizing camps for refugees and displaced persons and monitoring the distribution and use of humanitarian goods.

7. His Government believed that there was much room for improving the effectiveness of UNHCR and that a balanced approach should be taken to reforming that agency, particularly with respect to the 2004 process. Affirming his Government's support for the UNHCR Executive Committee, he said that the proposal to establish a world assembly on refugees required further study to take account of States' interests and available funds and to avoid politicizing the Office. UNHCR should also avoid duplicating the work done by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

8. Expressing concern at the proposal to establish a scale of assessment for the UNHCR annual budget, his delegation affirmed its support for the current voluntary financing modalities and said that the 30 per cent base-level model should be discretionary. Recalling that regional cooperation among States and international organizations was among the most effective mechanisms to regulate migration, his delegation expressed concern that the international community had not given proper attention to the process of follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference on refugees and migration in the Commonwealth of Independent States and neighbouring countries. States concerned should implement the steering group's recommendation to extend that process until 2005.

9. **Mr. Aliyev** (Azerbaijan), speaking also on behalf of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that regional conflicts had given rise to flows of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in various parts of the world, and the countries of the GUUAM Group (Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova) had tragic first-hand experience of the increasingly complex challenges such flows could pose. Since the early 1990s, those countries had been home to the largest refugee and IDP population per capita in the world, as a result of protracted armed conflicts in parts of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Millions of people who had been violently expelled from their homes were looking to the Governments of those countries for justice and help, but lasting solutions to their problems depended on a resolution of the conflicts and the cost of meeting their immediate needs was so high that it significantly affected the Governments' ability to develop market-based economies. While primary responsibility for dealing with such problems lay with the State concerned, the protection of refugees and IDPs should be seen as an international responsibility.

10. An issue of great concern to the Government of Ukraine was the return of people who had been deported during the former totalitarian regime, almost a quarter of a million of whom had returned to the Crimean peninsula in Ukraine in the past decade. In addition, 23,000 people had taken advantage of a simplified procedure for obtaining Ukrainian citizenship under a bilateral agreement between Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Unfortunately, international assistance to refugees, IDPs and former deportees in the GUUAM countries was on the decline. As the conditions for their safe return were not yet in place, he called on UNHCR, all relevant agencies and donor countries to provide not only humanitarian assistance but also development assistance, to enable them to become self-reliant.

11. In that connection, he stressed the need to strike a clear-cut balance between humanitarian assistance and development activities: in the GUUAM countries, there was some concern that the transition from relief to development had been initiated prematurely and that the return of refugees and IDPs to their home countries might not be sustainable. In the case of protracted conflicts, provision should be made for the continued delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance in the early stages of transition, and development-related projects should not be carried out at the expense of such assistance. He stressed that UNHCR should continue to pay special attention to the specific needs of women and children in its programmes and to the social and economic reintegration of young refugees and IDPs in particular, with a view to enhancing their ability to provide for themselves.

12. He agreed with the conclusion in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/58/89-E/2003/85) that the resident

coordinator system needed to be strengthened and allowed greater flexibility in the use of its resources if it was to maintain adequate levels of capacity and support. The country teams led by the resident coordinator should be at the forefront of efforts to define coherent strategies that took into account the specific circumstances of the country concerned. UNHCR needed the backing of the international community, in both financial and political terms, if it was to be able to mitigate the effects of humanitarian crises and ensure the protection of refugees, IDPs and former deportees.

13. **Mr. Negrín** (Mexico) said that it was essential to promote sustainable solutions for refugees, including repatriation, local integration and resettlement in third countries, and the "4Rs" strategy was an appropriate framework within which to do that. The draft resolution that his delegation would be sponsoring on refugee issues would contain the High Commissioner's proposals under the so-called "UNHCR 2004" initiative, which would, among other things, help create a suitable institutional context for coordinating the work of UNHCR with that of other organizations within the United Nations system. Another of the High Commissioner's initiatives, "Convention Plus", needed to be defined more clearly: the nature, content and scope of the agreements to be negotiated in connection with the initiative should be considered by all Member States in existing UNHCR bodies, and should be designed to implement, not rewrite, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

14. His Government, with the support of UNHCR, was strengthening its capacity to deal with refugees in Mexico and had taken steps to implement the Agenda for Protection, with the aim of improving procedures for granting asylum, protecting refugees within the wider context of migration, strengthening links with civil society, finding sustainable solutions to refugee problems and implementing a gender-sensitive approach. An example of a sustainable solution to refugee problems was Mexico's treatment of Guatemalan refugees, who were repatriated on a voluntary basis or granted Mexican nationality.

15. **Ms. Cheng-Hopkins** (World Food Programme) said that the World Food Programme and UNHCR, two of the main United Nations front-line agencies in emergency situations, had enjoyed a long-standing and fruitful collaboration, mainly because they were both cognizant of the crucial importance of the linkages between peace and security, humanitarian work and development. She strongly supported the involvement of UNHCR in common country assessments and in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which linked UNHCR more closely with United Nations country teams. She also supported the High Commissioner's comments on the need to strengthen the capacity of UNHCR and on the urgent need for the international community to reach some conclusion on the situation of IDPs.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.